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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN OFFICIALS REPORT BETTER TREATMENT FOR ALEKSANYAN

REF: MOSCOW 459

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons: 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: GOR officials, including Human Rights Ombudsman Lukin and three members of the Public Chamber visited former YUKOS Vice President Vasiliy Aleksanyan on February 21 in his room in a specialized Moscow hospital. They confirmed that Aleksanyan had initially been chained to his hospital bed, but they characterized his current conditions of confinement as "satisfactory." A member of Russia's civil society called the intervention a "unanimous rejection" of the GOR's treatment of Aleksanyan and hoped that it meant that human rights organizations would "no longer be a puppet" of the Kremlin. Ambassador raised Aleksanyan's treatment February 25 with MFA Deputy Foreign Minister Yakovenko, who described Aleksanyan's current treatment regime as satisfactory. End summary.

Chamber Members, Lukin Visit Aleksanyan

¶2. (SBU) The Public Chamber members who visited Aleksanyan on February 21 included Henry Reznik, Leonid Roshal, and Nikolay Svanidze. Public Chamber member Anatoliy Kucherena helped initiate the visit, but was abroad at the time of the visit in connection with the new human rights councils he is setting up in Paris and New York. Reznik, who in addition to being a member of the Public Chamber is President of the Moscow Bar Association, told reporters that contrary to statements by the Russian Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN), Aleksanyan said he had never refused medical treatment for the HIV/AIDS and lymphoma from which he is suffering.

¶3. (SBU) Public Chamber members were also interested in reports from Aleksanyan's lawyers on the conditions of his confinement, specifically that he was chained to his bed during his first week at the hospital and only set free to go to the bathroom. Svanidze confirmed that initially Aleksanyan had been chained to his bed, but noted that the handcuffs used to detain Aleksanyan have now been removed. Reznik added that Aleksanyan had been chained for ten days and termed such treatment "torture." Reznik harshly criticized the decision to treat an innocent suspect who has life-threatening illnesses and is accused only of financial crimes in such a manner. FSIN spokesman Aleksandr Sidorov said on February 21 that Aleksanyan was chained to his bed only when there was no policeman on duty and then only to prevent Aleksanyan from escaping or committing suicide.

¶4. (SBU) Following his visit, Human Right Ombudsman Lukin stated he was satisfied with the current conditions of Aleksanyan's confinement, but noted that he had agreed with the members of the Public Chamber with whom he had visited the hospital not to pass further public judgments on the

conditions in which Aleksanyan is being held pending the preparation of a Public Chamber report. Lukin praised Chamber members for their interest in the conditions in which Aleksanyan is being held.

Ambassador Raises with Deputy Foreign Minister

¶5. (C) Deputy FM Yakovenko told the Ambassador February 25 that he thought Aleksanyan was getting proper medical treatment in his current hospital and noted that there are "many cases like this, unfortunately," and that it seemed "not entirely fair" to focus so much attention on just the Aleksanyan case.

Presidential Council Member Reacts

¶6. (C) Presidential Council for Human Rights member William Smirnov told us February 26 that the intervention by members of the Public Chamber and Ombudsman Lukin represented a "unanimous rejection" of the treatment of Aleksanyan and that their opposition had changed the GOR's treatment of him. Smirnov hoped that the ability to get the authorities to backpedal on this issue had bolstered civil society and had perhaps stimulated it to be more active on other issues. Smirnov hoped that reaction to Aleksanyan's treatment signified that civil society would be less inclined to be a puppet of the next government.

Comment

¶7. (C) With visits by Lukin and the three Chamber members, the Aleksanyan case has disappeared from the media here. Reznik and Svanidze, along with other Chamber members like Kucherena, Alla Gerber, and Yevgeniy Yasin are more outspoken than many of their colleagues. With their expressed satisfaction with Aleksanyan's current treatment, and their condemnation of the practice of periodically chaining him to his bed, the standoff between civil society and the GOR over the Aleksanyan case seems to have ended.

BURNS